

New Zealand tourism strategy focuses on 'high value' tourists at the expense of the rest



By **Ben Groundwater**

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It's never felt particularly crowded to me at Milford Sound. Walking the Milford Track, a 53-kilometre amble through some of New Zealand's most spectacular Fiordland scenery, you don't see all that many people.

You meet up with other "trampers" in the huts at night, and you share stories, sometimes share meals, but during the day, it's easy enough to avoid the masses out there on the trail when you're breathing in that beautiful air, taking in those views, soaking up one of the world's great tourism experiences.

So it's a little surprising to find that Milford Sound-Piopirotahi has been suffering. Blame all the day-trippers. This area of New Zealand has been hit (pre-COVID, at least) by over-tourism, with 870,000 annual visitors to an environment of great beauty and fragility – a figure that has more than doubled within a decade. And now, in this new era of travel in which a major reset is possible, the Kiwis want to do something about it.

And it's not just Milford Sound. This is one of several areas in New Zealand that have been heavily reliant on the tourism dollar, and which have also experienced vast numbers of visitors – too many, according to the NZ tourism minister, Stuart Nash. His plan, announced last week, is to scale back those tourist numbers in the future by targeting "high value" visitors who will bring just as much money to these regions with fewer annual visits.

This is in line with another idea floated a few months ago by the New Zealand government, which is to introduce a national departure tax, something to reflect the environmental cost of flying to and from New Zealand. Revenue from the tax would go towards research into low-emission aviation, and to help Pacific Island nations deal with climate change.

Both, at face value, seem like good ideas. Necessary ideas. There's no doubt that overtourism was a serious problem in the pre-COVID world, and it seems likely to become a problem once again in the next few years. Something must be done, and I can see plenty of other destinations with the same issues following the Kiwis' lead.

The idea of chasing "high value" visitors makes sense. Governments will always want the sweet, sweet revenue that tourism brings, but with this idea, they can appear to care for the environment, keeping most stakeholders happy. Meanwhile, A sizeable departure levy would discourage unnecessary visits and prohibit some people from flying.

Other countries are considering similar moves. Indonesia has mooted sky-high entrance fees for the environmentally sensitive Komodo Island in 2019. Earlier that same year, Venice considered introducing fees for day trippers wanting to enter the city.

But herein lies the problem, the inconvenient truth. The solution to over-tourism is to stop so many tourists visiting, and the tourists the Kiwis' ideas target are those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, those who don't have as much money to spend as others.

<https://www.smh.com.au/traveller/inspiration/new-zealand-tourism-strategy-focuses-on-high-value-tourists-at-the-expense-of-the-rest-20210511-h1vqjj.html>

What's a high-quality tourist, anyway?

Daniel Smith 12:18, Aug 17 2022

Tourism groups are questioning Tourism Minister Stuart Nash's claims that New Zealand should aim to attract "high-quality tourists". At last week's Tourism Export Council of New Zealand annual conference, Nash said New Zealand's marketing spin aims for "high-quality tourists".

"We are going to welcome backpackers ... [but] we are not going to target the people who put on Facebook how they can travel around our country on \$10 a day eating two-minute noodles."

The president of the Backpacker Youth and Adventure Tourism Association (BYATA), Brian Westwood said the comments made New Zealand seem arrogant and were hypocritical.

"New Zealand youth travellers go worldwide for their OE, often travelling cheaply or backpacking. How can we say we don't want these tourists to visit us? It is hypocritical," Westwood said.

Nash and the Government were missing a key difference between high-paying and high-quality tourists, Westwood said.

"Backpackers are high-quality tourists. They visit more regions of the country than any other market. While they may stay in budget accommodation, youth travellers do a third more activities than other travellers, which can be a boon for regional tourism economies," he said.

Regional Tourism New Zealand chairperson David Perks said it was a bad idea for the Government to direct the tourism industry to put "all of its eggs in one basket".

"As soon as you say you only want one type of visitor, you create challenges for yourself. Perks said that a diverse mix of tourists is very important for the travellers and the New Zealand communities they interact with," Perks said.

He said that regions outside the "tourism superhighway" benefited from younger visitors, who stayed longer and did more activities in an area than older travellers. He said that many backpackers entered the country on working holiday visas and contributed to the economy economically by labouring in primary industries and paying taxes in New Zealand.

Roscoe Price Moor, founder of road trip planner app Roady, said it was a bad business decision to ignore certain demographics of the tourism market.

"So many of our tourism experiences are made for the backpacker market—white water rafting, off-track adventure experiences. So many of these are small mum-and-dad businesses often overlooked by the higher spending travellers," Price Moor said.

While there had been an understandable backlash against the behaviour of some freedom campers, the Government needed to teach this group how to be sustainable traveller rather than cut them off completely. Travellers who had a good experience in New Zealand while they were young had the potential to become repeat visitors, injecting more money into the economy over a longer period, he said.

While higher-spending travellers would bring in money to the sector in the short-term, younger travellers would provide sustainable income, he said.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/129588529/whats-a-highquality-tourist-anyway>